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Institute Focuses On Equipping New Breed of School Leaders

Postsecondary, Elementary and Secondary Education Teams Come Together to Address Leadership Preparation

HAMMOND, La. -- After developing widely-recognized school accountability and teacher quality improvement programs, Louisiana is now poised to become a model for other states in its preparation of school leaders, a Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) official said today.

"Louisiana is the first state in this 16-state region to step forward and agree to change the way it prepares school leaders," SREB Leadership Initiative Director Kathy O'Neill said. She and other SREB officials are urging states to develop a "new breed" of school leaders, those who are as focused on improving student achievement as they are on managing the more traditional aspects of schools.

O'Neill addressed teams of university faculty and school and district leaders from throughout the state in the opening session of a three-day conference entitled, "Redesign For Educational Excellence Institute," which is being held through Wednesday at Southeastern Louisiana University. The institute is sponsored jointly by the Louisiana Board of Regents, the University of Louisiana System, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Education.

"We cannot continue to produce educational leaders in the same way that we have produced them in the past. Schools have changed, and the needs of educational leaders have changed. This event is an important step forward in adapting to those changes," said Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph Savoie. "Our goal is to transform our graduate educational leadership programs so that we foster effective, successful learning environments at every level - at every college and university, at every school board office, and at every elementary and secondary school in Louisiana. If we can provide effective leaders for our schools and districts, new teachers graduating from our redesigned teacher preparation programs are more apt to be successful."

The conference will provide professional development for university and district personnel who are responsible for the design and implementation of educational leadership programs. The institute uses an SREB model to explore ways for leaders to use student

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Equipping New Leaders

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achievement data to lead change, develop and use effective curricula and create a high-performance learning culture.

“We’ve made significant progress in addressing the quality of Louisiana’s teachers. Our next area of focus needs to be in developing the kind of leaders who can drive student achievement,” said UL System President Sally Clausen in her remarks to the group. “We have powerful evidence throughout Louisiana that the right leader can turn around a low-performing school. By working together, schools and universities can ensure that every school in Louisiana has the same opportunity to grow.”

Clausen said accountability and a changing society mean greater pressures on principals than ever before. The average principal today works about 18 more hours a week than 10 years ago, many of them on weekends and during summer months, as schools strive to help students meet higher performance standards, she said.

“Louisiana is moving in the right direction even though we must prepare as many as 300 to 350 new principals each year,” said State Superintendent of Education Cecil J. Picard, who also spoke at the event. “Preparing our principals for the role of instructional leader is not an easy task, but it is one that is critical to the success of our schools.”

Louisiana has received high praise for its education reform efforts, including those to address teaching quality. Recently, *Education Week*’s “Quality Counts” ranked Louisiana fifth in the nation for its efforts to improve teaching. Among other important milestones, teacher education programs at all of Louisiana’ colleges of education - public and private - have now been completely redesigned, and alternative certification programs have been streamlined to help put qualified, competent teachers from non-traditional backgrounds in the classroom in the most efficient manner possible in an effort to address the state’s critical teacher shortage.

Louisiana’s classroom teacher and graduate education reform initiatives began a little over three years ago, and in large part resulted from the work of Louisiana’s Blue Ribbon Commission for Teacher Quality.

